

Testimony to Presidential Commission 2/20/03.

I am Gus Baffa, President of the 102,000 member National Rural Letter Carrier's Association, which is celebrating its 100th Anniversary this year.

Rural letter carriers each deliver on the average 200 parcels a week, to customers like Jim Folk of Center, North Dakota, who orders repair parts for his farm equipment by US mail, because Jim relies on rural letter carriers to deliver parcels to his farm 6 days a week.

Most rural carriers drive their own vehicles, some to remote places like Window Rock, Arizona, where Mona Laughing receives, by U.S. mail, the wool dyes she needs to make her world famous Navajo rugs.

Rural carriers serve 30 million families, including the Gingrich family who own a farm near Lebanon, Pennsylvania and rely on the U.S. mail to deliver their county newspaper, which is their link to local news and events.

You may be surprised to learn where else we collect and deliver. Some of the 70,000 rural routes are in places like The Woodlands, Texas where customers wait to place orders from the wealth of different mail-order catalogues they receive in the mail every day.

In Lake Travis, Texas, US Postal Service customers including a well-known television network evening news anchorman, receive a variety of magazines from a rural letter carrier.

We assist with the operations of Stevens Parr's boarding and grooming kennel business in New Haven, Connecticut by picking up and delivering the kennel's invoices. Stevens Parr's kennel is on a route that makes up only a small part of the 3 million miles a day rural carriers drive.

Rural letter carriers serve as a "post office on wheels." We sell stamps and collect the Valentine cards mailed by customers like the Lucini family in Sterling, Virginia, in addition to delivering, on the average route, two thousand eight hundred seventy-five pieces daily.

Today, a rural letter carrier will deliver a credit card statement to a resident in Fountain Hills, Arizona. That statement is only one of the 1.7 billion pieces Capitol One Bank puts in the mail stream annually

We deliver to both the rural areas and to the growing suburbs of America.

Our customers... and the mailers we work for ...expect and depend on collection and delivery 6 days a week. It is a vital part of the communication and commerce of this country. The six-day delivery of the US Postal Service, to every address in America must be preserved and should be defined in the law.

I've tried to give you a verbal picture of the diversity of my union's collection and delivery network. The United States is unique in the world with regards to mail. We handle 46% of the world's mail. Americans do more financial transactions through the mail than any other nation in the world. Only 22% of Americans receive or pay any portion of their bills electronically. Yet, under current circumstances, the Postal Service business model will fail.

There must be legislative changes to protect the U.S. Postal Service that Americans have come to count on and trust. The antiquated rate setting process needs to be revamped or replaced. Our competitor, electronic communication, goes around the world instantaneously. In order to remain competitive the US Postal Service needs the flexibility of being able to adjust rates as quickly as our competition. The 'break even' and "no retained earnings" provisions in the current business model that governs the Postal Service are years beyond their usefulness. Let us work with the business mail community and grow the US mail volume with increased negotiated service agreements.

My union is eager to work with Postal Service management if they are serious about creating incentives on a craft-by-craft basis to motivate and improve the productivity of the workforce. When these and other ideas are passed into new laws, the USA's unique mail system of collection and delivery everywhere, to everyone, everyday can be maintained.